

Taking Care of Our Own

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Sermon for April 28th, 1996

Lessons for the Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year A

Acts 2:42-47

Psalm 23

1 Peter 2:19-25

John 10:1-10

I spent four of my eight years as an undergrad at SU delivering pizzas for Domino's...and this was on top of my regular full-time job at the SU library. In spite of what you might have heard about some of the horrors of pizza delivery, I actually enjoyed this job.

First of all, there was the free food...anytime we slightly burned a pie or it came back to the store for some reason, we got to eat it. Then there was the fact that as a pizza driver, you really got to learn your way around the area.

Then, of course, there were the tips. On a good night you could make ten dollars from a four hour shift. You got to the point where you knew which neighborhoods had good tippers and which ones had people who would actually wait for the 4¢ change from their \$3.96 pizza (this was back in the 80s). As a result, when Cheryl's sister and her husband were buying the house that we live in now, I could say to them, "It's a good neighborhood...they tip."

But aside from the tips and the free food was the fact that on any given night, if you were driving in the University area, you were bound to run into a few people you knew. So I wasn't at all surprised when I took a pizza to a certain room in Shaw Hall and found that I was delivering it to Don and Lisa, two

people I knew from Lutheran Campus Ministry.

I don't remember what kind of pizza they ordered. I don't remember whether or not they had Pepsi with it. I don't remember how much the pizza came to. But I do remember the tip.

Don gave me a two-dollar tip, which was a lot in student money, and said, "We Lutherans take care of our own."

All who believed were together and had all things in common. They would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

That's what Luke wrote about the early Church. If Don were to paraphrase it, he'd probably just say, "We Christians take care of our own."

Taking care of our own is a phrase that we can very easily become uncomfortable with because it can bring up images of exclusion. How many times have you heard someone say, "We have to take care of *our own* before we worry about anyone else's needs"? And yet, I don't think this is the way that Don meant it. When Don said "We Lutherans take care of our own" he was being *inclusive*.

He was including me, up to that point still a card carrying Episcopalian, with the sheep in the Lutheran flock.

Do we take care of our own? Do we Lutherans, do we Christians, really take care of each other like the members of the early church did? I think it's safe to say that we don't come anywhere close. Lots of things conspire against us to prevent this.

Part of the problem is that we're all so scattered. How many of us live in the same neighborhoods or even on the same block? How many of us only see each other once or twice a week here? It's hard to know the needs and take care of people you only see once a week.

Another part of the problem is the American obsession with not wanting to give up independence or control. We don't want to let people know that we may have a need that they can help us with. We don't want to let people know that we can't do it all ourselves. We don't want to owe anyone anything back in return.

There's a saying in our house that comes from watching too many families play the "You should know what I want" or "You should know why I'm upset" games. The saying is, "We are not Kreskin," after the famous mind reader. How many of us are angry at the church for not taking care of some need of ours...some need that ***we haven't told anyone about?*** How many of us just expect the church to know when there's a problem that we need help with? The church, though it is the body of Christ, is not Kreskin.

Ironically, one of the things that may conspire against us taking care of each

other is how much we try to take care of the rest of the world. If you're my age you may remember a song by Three Dog Night called **Easy To Be Hard**. It says:

Especially people who care about strangers
Who care about evil and social injustice
Do you only care about the bleeding crowd
How about a needing friend

For some reason it seems so much easier to mount a campaign to take care of the problems of people in some far off land than to help those who are among us. Perhaps, like the crud that gets on my eyeglasses all the time, the problems of the people next to us in the pews are too close to see. Maybe we think we'd be being too intrusive if we offered to help without being asked. Maybe we're afraid of looking like a failure if we ask for help.

And yet, if we worry about appearing too intrusive, aren't we more concerned about ***ourselves?*** Where is the care we're supposed to show for the other members of the body of Christ? If we don't ask for help when we need it because of our own pride or need for independence, aren't we depriving someone else of a chance of Christlike service?

There are many reasons why we don't look like that picture Luke painted of the early Church. But we don't have to just sit around and beat ourselves up about it. We don't need to look at their example as law, as "Do it this way or you've blown it and you're not worthy of the name Christian." Let's consider why they did it this way, why they shared everything.

I'd like to think that it was a response to the love God had already showed them

through Jesus, a response to a gift already given, rather than an attempt to earn salvation by making some sort of business deal with God.

I remembered the example that Don set and try to take that as a challenge. An ideal to aspire to. Let's look at the example that Luke wrote about in the same way, an ideal to aspire to, even though we'll certainly fall on our faces from time to time.

Let's start trying to take care of our own *as well as* "the bleeding crowd". Try actually letting people know that you're having problems that they might be able to help out with.

And while you're at it, the next time you order a pizza, give the delivery person a good tip. After all, I'd like to think that we Lutherans take care of *all* pizza deliverers.